

THE ICRC IN AFGHANISTAN – MARCH 2003

Facts and Figures (January - February 2003)

Protection

According to its international mandate, the ICRC visits detainees held in relation to the conflict by the Afghan authorities and the US forces to ensure that they are treated humanely and can communicate with their families.

In January and February 2003 the ICRC visited over 1,258 security detainees and prisoners in 39 places of detention under the responsibility of Afghan authorities or United States forces. Of these, 231 were seen and registered for the first time. The total figure includes prisoners transferred to the US military base at Guantanamo Bay.

Some 170 released detainees received assistance from the ICRC to return home. In cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society, the ICRC processed 1,913 Red Cross messages (RCMs) in January and February, of which 847 were exchanged between detainees and their families.

Assistance

The ICRC concentrates its economic security programmes in regions most seriously affected by conflict and drought in the central highlands (south of Mazar-i-Sharif, Ghor and Bamyan Provinces).

These programmes aim to relieve the debt burden facing these rural communities and try to bring their living standards up to pre-drought level.

The first two months of the year have been quiet as winter conditions hamper movement in the field. Ghor office opened again at the end of February.

In Bamyan preparations were made for the implementation of a vegetable seed programme targeting 18,000 women. Preparations were also underway for the start of the parasite control programme for 100,000 animals.

Since the beginning of 2003 the ICRC has distributed about 317 tonnes (MT) of chickpea and flax seeds to some 81,300 beneficiaries in areas south of Mazar. Preparations were also made for the implementation of the parasite control programme for 150,000 animals.

For further information on ICRC operations in Afghanistan please see earlier factsheets

Health

The ICRC supports local medical services disrupted by over 20 years of conflict, to help them provide adequate care for wounded and sick.

In January-February, the facilities assisted by the health programme cared for almost 9,000 in-patients and around 66,000 out-patients, and performed 5,300 operations.

The ICRC continues to provide regular support to six hospitals (Kandahar, Ghazni, Jalalabad, Bamyan and two in Kabul). This assistance consists of medicine, medical instruments and non-medical items such as fuel for generators, soap, staff support as well as small maintenance work.

Through delegated projects implemented by the Finnish and Japanese Red Cross societies, four more hospitals now receive regular assistance including upgrading of infrastructure, provision of medical equipment, staff training and a regular supply of renewable medical and non-medical items.

Support to the gynecology / obstetrics department of Mirwais hospital in Kandahar has just started.

In January and February an additional 23 health facilities received assistance with medical supplies.

Water and habitat

One of ICRC's core tasks is to maintain access to drinking water for populations affected by conflicts as disruption and destruction of water structures and distribution systems can have ravaging health consequences. In Afghanistan this includes maintenance and repairs on water networks and sanitation systems, and in hospitals – these are some of the main projects:

Kabul

- Rehabilitation of the water systems at two large housing estates, in order to improve access to drinking water for an estimated 13,000 people.
- 130 hand pumps repaired - estimated 50,000 beneficiaries.
- 202 new latrines built and 50 existing latrines renovated since the beginning of the year - estimated 2,500 beneficiaries.

Ghazni

- Renovation of the existing water system including drilling of two new wells and repair of leaks in the

distribution line, benefiting some 60,000 people.
Expected completion in June 2003.

Charikar

- Renovation of the existing water pumping station benefiting 40,000 people.

Mazar-I-Sharif

- Repair of four-community water supply networks in Bedel area benefiting some 60,000 people.
- 3,500 new latrines constructed since the beginning of the year - estimated 42,000 beneficiaries.

Jalalabad

- Reconnection of the eastern part of the city water network

Renovation and repairs in hospitals:

- Work completed in Bamyan and in progress at five other places.

Orthopaedic services

The ICRC has been involved in orthopaedic and rehabilitation assistance to the disabled since 1988. More than 54,000 patients (including some 27,500 amputees) have been assisted.

The ICRC runs six orthopaedic centres – at Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Gulbahar, Faizabad and Jalalabad. Approximately 80 per cent of the amputees assisted are mine victims (70 per cent of them civilians).

Between January and February 2003, 666 new patients were registered and assisted.

Since 1999, some 1,257 patients have been given micro credit support to start up small business – 34 so far this year.

In January and February the ICRC home care teams made more than 400 visits to housebound paraplegic patients in Kabul.

Mine action

The ICRC tries to prevent injuries and deaths by gathering information on the cause of accidents and the location of mines and UXO, and by promoting safe behaviour in communities at risk.

In January and February 2,364 mine awareness sessions were held by ICRC / Afghan Red Crescent teams and community volunteer instructors in 1,372 locations for around 20,500 adults and some 16,800 children.

Twenty ordnance clearance requests were passed on to the UN mine action center and the HALO Trust.

Promotion of humanitarian law

The ICRC's internationally-recognized mandate is not only to aid victims of armed conflicts but also to promote international humanitarian law (IHL).

To this end numerous courses, presentations and lectures were given to government officials, members of the Afghan and US armed forces, the police, university lecturers and Afghan Red Crescent members. These covered several hundred people.

A list of proposed ICRC support and co-operation activities was submitted to the Ministry of Defence.

Cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)

The ICRC, as part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, assists the Afghan Red Crescent technically and financially to build its capacity in various fields.

This includes grassroots assistance to the most vulnerable members of the Afghan population, services to the population affected by the conflicts and natural disasters such as earthquake and drought.

One of the key projects is the vocational training programme, which teaches income-generating skills to men and women.

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